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# Applications of personal development in the re-education of imprisoned women

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## Abstract

In this research we aim at highlighting the role of moral emotions in the development and re-education of imprisoned women. We want to show that shame and guilt are two important feelings in the “cure” and rehabilitation of inmates. We also want to implement a program of personal development in order to increase feelings of guilt and reduce feelings of shame. Another goal is to highlight the difference in the two types of emotions depending on the legal status. In this research we used the questionnaire for shame and guilt and personal development activities. Our results indicate that recidivist subjects have a higher level of shame and a lower level of guilt in comparison with those having committed only one offence. However, the results differ depending on the type of offence. Although self-esteem has a significant effect on the two types of feelings, we can see that at times it can have a compensatory role.

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## 1. Introduction

Moral sentiments are a key element of the human moral system, influencing the link between moral standards and behaviour. Individual moral standards mean knowing and internalizing norms and conventions. Generally, people's moral standards are dictated by universal laws and cultural influences. To live a moral and constructive life implies having daily a significant number of behaviours morally relevant. But, as imperfect human beings, the

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behaviour is not in a perfect correspondence with our moral standards. There are many explanations regarding the discrepancy between intention and behaviour, both in connection to our desirable attitudes and our undesirable ones. Many theories and psychosocial researches have been directed to understanding the imperfect relationship between intentions (moral decisions) and behaviour. Field studies show variability in behaviour depending on the context. Interpersonal relationships may influence the relationship between intention and behaviour. The diffusion of responsibility can undermine the individual's ability to act, even when his/her beliefs are deep (DeVisser & Smith, 2004). Ajzen's theory (1991) on planned behaviour provides a model that integrates how attitudes, norms and perceived control become intentions and subsequent behaviours (Tangney, Stuewig & Mashek, 2007).

## **2. Premises**

An event history analysis indicated that feelings of guilt at the beginning of the sentence were correlated with a low rate of recurrence, and feelings of shame were correlated with an increased rate of relapse. Guilt is felt when people violate existing social norms or expectations and accuse themselves or others of having an incorrect behaviour. Shame refers to the anxiety caused by social degradation or perception or the anticipation of negative impressions about themselves from others (Scheff, 1988). These perceptions arise from the actual loss or anticipating the loss of someone's value and respect in society, due to the violation of morality or lack of achieving a certain goal (Tangney, Stuewig & Mashek, 2007). Moral feelings are awakened from the breach of existing agreements, rules and implicit and explicit expectations, norms and laws.

## **Objectives**

In this research we aim at highlighting the role of moral emotions in the development and re-education of imprisoned women. We want to show that shame and guilt are two important feelings in the "cure" and rehabilitation of inmates. It is very important that, as the person approaching release from prison, the same should feel more guilt and less shame. We intend to assess the level of shame and guilt of inmates to see the feelings the subjects feel for their crimes. We also want to implement a program of personal development, based on activities supported by interpersonal relationships and interactions, in order to increase feelings of guilt and reduce feelings of shame. Another objective is to highlight the difference in the two types of emotions depending on the legal status (non-recidivist/recidivist).

## **3. Hypothesis**

Based on the goals above, we seek to test the following hypotheses: there are significant differences in the moral feelings depending on the legal status and type of offence; non-recidivist subjects and recidivist offenders will have values at the level of feelings of shame and guilt at the end of the personal development program different in comparison with the beginning of the program.

## **4. Variables**

The variables used in this research are: the legal status, feelings of shame, guilt and self-esteem. Legal status refers to whether the subject is at the first offense or if he/she is a recidivist offender. Guilt and shame are measured on an interval / ratio scale and assess the subjects' feelings towards the act they committed. Self-esteem was measured on an interval / ratio scale.

## **5. Subjects**

For this research we used a group of 55 people, 27 of which are at their first offense, and 28 are recidivist offenders. Subjects are aged between 16 and 57 years and were convicted of theft, drug trafficking, human trafficking, robbery and murder. For the experimental group 24 subjects were selected (14 non-recidivist and 10

recidivist offenders) and the control group consisted of 31 individuals (13 non- recidivist and 18 recidivist offenders). In order to be most effective, the experimental group was divided into three groups of eight subjects.

## 6. Research instruments

To measure the feelings of shame and guilt we used a questionnaire consisting of 16 that we called SGQ (8 items measure the level of shame and 8 items assess the guilt). To validate this questionnaire we conducted a pilot test and obtained an index of Cronbach alpha internal consistency of 0.84 (inferior limit 95% = 0.74; superior limit 95% = 0.91). For the shame rate, the Cronbach alpha index is 0.80 (inferior limit 95% = 0.68; superior limit 95% = 0.89), and the Cronbach alpha index for the guilt rate is 0.85 (inferior limit 95% = 0.75; superior limit 95% = 0.91). Subjects had to respond on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is strongly disagreeing and 5 is strongly agreeing. To assess self-esteem the Rosenberg questionnaire was used, consisting of 10 items; each item is scored on a scale from 1 to 4, the minimum value representing the total consent of the subject, and the maximum value representing the total disagreement of the same. The final score is obtained by summing the points obtained to the 10 items.

## 7. Results interpretation

Before starting the development program, the average of the scores for shame, at the level of the entire group, is 27.00 (SD = 5.83; inferior limit 95% = 25.42; superior limit 95% = 28.58). At the end of development program, the average scores for shame, at the level of the entire group are 24.05 (SD = 6.00; inferior limit 95% = 22.43; superior limit 95% = 25.68).

The average of the scores for guilt before starting the personal development program, at the level of the entire group, is 28.33 (SD = 5.26; inferior limit 95% = 26.91; superior limit 95% = 29.75). At the end of development program, the average scores for guilt, the entire group is 31.07 (SD = 5.75; inferior limit 95% = 29.52; superior limit 95% = 32.63). Below you have the averages for the subgroups of subjects.

Table 1 - Averages for feelings of shame and guilt depending on the group and legal status

	Average	Standard Deviation	Confidence Interval 95%
Non-recidivist initial shame	26,04	4,52	24,25 - 27,83
Non-recidivist final shame	22,37	4,36	20,65 - 24,10
Recidivist initial shame	27,93	6,82	25,28 - 30,58
Recidivist final shame	25,68	6,94	22,99 - 28,37
Non-recidivist initial guilt	29,11	6,02	26,73 - 31,49
Non-recidivist final guilt	32,26	6,64	29,63 - 34,89
Recidivist initial guilt	27,57	4,38	25,87 - 29,27
Recidivist final guilt	29,93	4,57	28,15 - 31,70
Experimental group initial shame	26,88	5,69	24,47 - 29,28
Experimental group final shame	20,58	4,01	18,89 - 22,28
Control group initial shame	27,10	6,03	24,88 - 29,31
Control group final shame	26,74	5,95	24,56 - 28,93
Experimental group initial guilt	30,79	4,70	28,80 - 32,78
Experimental group final guilt	35,92	3,33	34,51 - 37,32
Control group initial guilt	26,42	4,91	24,62 - 28,22
Control group final guilt	27,32	4,22	25,77 - 28,87

Self-esteem was used as a covariant variable to provide a more accurate explanation of the results we will get. Moral emotions, shame and guilt in our case, are closely related to self-esteem and we need to consider its influence when we want to increase guilt and to reduce shame in women deprived of their liberty.

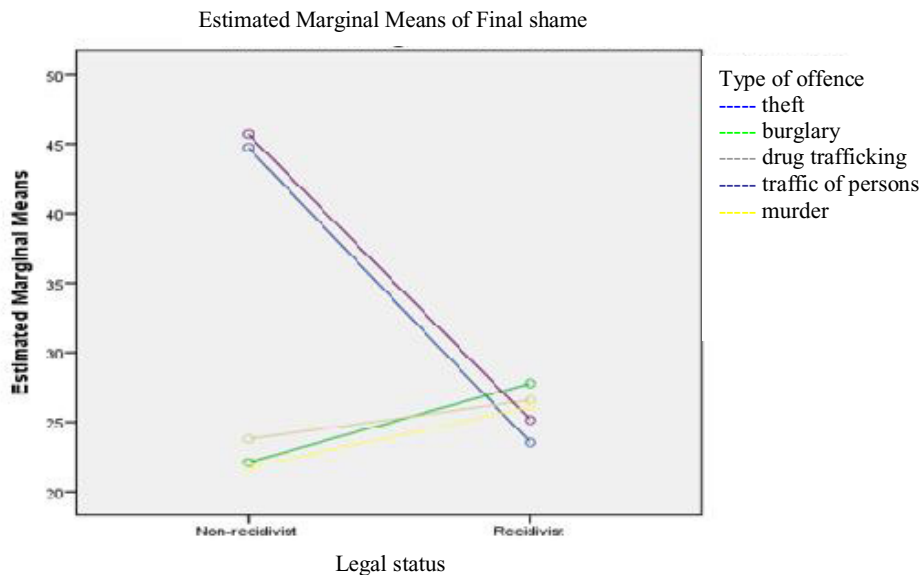
For the self-esteem, at the level of the entire group, subjects received an average of 29.25 (SD = 5.35; inferior limit 95% = 27.81; superior limit 95% = 30.70). For the experimental group, self-esteem has averaged 33.21 (SD = 1.71; inferior limit 95% = 32.48; superior limit 95% = 33.93) and for the control group self-esteem has averaged 26.19 (SD = 5.21; inferior limit 95% = 24.28; superior limit 95% = 28.11). To test the hypothesis according to which there is a significant difference in the shame and guilt based on the legal status of subjects and type of offence, we used the ANCOVA statistical test. To get the safest explanation we use the self-esteem variable as a covariant.

Table 2 - Correlations of self-esteem with guilt and shame

Self-esteem - shame	-0,53 (inferior limit 95% = -0,30; superior limit 95% = -0,69)
Self-esteem - guilt	0,58 (inferior limit 95% = -0,37; superior limit 95% = -0,73)

Thus, we see that the legal status (recidivist vs. non-recidivist) has a significant effect on the feeling of shame ( $F = 10.05$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.40$ ), whereas the crime has no significant effect ( $F = 1.00$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.10$ ). These two factors, taken together, have a significant effect on the feeling of shame ( $F = 0.80$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ;  $\eta^2 = 0.08$ ). From the chart below we can see how shame differs depending on the legal status and type of the offence. We can see that, for all types of offences, shame is greater in recidivist offenders, except those closed for human trafficking. Perhaps these persons feel very ashamed for the deed they have committed, especially given that they are at their first offence.

Although self-esteem has a significant effect on the feeling of shame, the interaction between legal situation\* type of offence is not significant ( $F = 0.55$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.12$ ). However in the chart below we can see some changes. Besides the fact that for those with human being trafficking shame remains higher in non-recidivist subjects, we can see that even when people with theft have a more pronounced shame. Thus, self-esteem cannot play a compensatory role on this feeling. In addition, within the other offences, self-esteem comes as a clearing and we see that the differences between recidivists and non-recidivist subjects become smaller.



Legal status has also a significant effect on the feeling of guilt ( $F = 3.51$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.48$ ), while the type of offence does not have a significant effect ( $F = 1.39$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.13$ ). The combined effect of legal status and the type of crime is also not significant ( $F = 0.96$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.09$ ). From the chart below we can see that non-recidivist subjects have levels of shame in each type of offence, except at the level of the robbery and human trafficking.

Self-esteem has also a significant effect on the feeling of guilt, but the interaction legal status\* type of offence is not significant ( $F = 1.35$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.25$ ). The control of self-esteem allows us to see that in non-recidivists shame is lower at the level of theft and robbery. These are crimes against property and are very tempting. Other studies include such offences among those with high risk of relapse. For this reason it is very important to work on the self-esteem of people with such crimes and to make them understand that their actions can be corrected.

The first hypothesis was partially confirmed in that the state of relapse has an effect only on feelings of shame and guilt.

To test the second hypothesis we used the ANCOVA test again and as covariant variable we used the difference between the two groups at baseline. Thus, we see that there is a significant difference between the two groups both at the level of shame ( $F = 7.37$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.44$ ) and at the level of guilt ( $F = 4.00$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.36$ ) at the end of the personal development program.

## 8. Conclusions

Throughout the progress of this program, we aimed at facilitating self-knowledge, making connections and connecting the participants, giving them the opportunities to explore personal characteristics and practice different ways of expressing their personality. We used techniques and exercises aimed at self-awareness, development of emotional skills, forming the capacity of recognition of emotions, awareness of the thought-emotion-behaviour relationship, identification and practice of strategies to delay impulses, increase the self-awareness and self-control ability. We also aimed at approaching the transposition from one other being to the self, involving the knowledge of the other, integrating the knowledge of the latter into the own system of values, returning then to approach from self to another, i.e. implementation, identification, projection in (with) situation of the other and the design of own behaviour related to the aim pursued.

## 9. Further directions

Moral feelings as shame and guilt have the ability to motivate people to start, or start anew, to obey social rules (especially moral). The German legal system, like the one of many other countries, emphasizes the significance and influence of moral sentiments on the future behaviour by establishing that, among other things, sanctions can generate the discernment of the offender on the unlawfulness of his/her conduct.

The few similar studies that have been conducted indicate that crimes targeting other persons make the offender feel guiltier (Weizmann-Henelius, Sailas, Viemero, & Eronen, 2002). Also, a high level of guilt was noticed to offenders who received psychotherapeutic treatment compared with those who received no treatment (Weizmann-Henelius, Sailas, Viemero, & Eronen, 2002).

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